

## Advent

by Fallen Ark Angel

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Summary: Sometimes all it takes is a shock from the past to remind you just how beautiful the present really is. - One-shot, set in the Marriage Material series.

## Advent

In the five months that Aurora had been living with Laxus and Mirajane Dreyar, she'd already been to more places than she could count. Laxus was very intent, it seemed, on knocking her dreary days stuck in an orphanage out of her mind and filling her memories with all kinds of new experiences.

They went to the beach, stayed in a cabin on some mount that had been fun to hike (for her; Laxus and Mira kinda just grinned through it), went to the capital, and even went to this big museum of all things relating to magic that Laxus definitely didn't enjoy, but went through the motions for Aurora's sake.

Laxus was rather tense at times when they were traveling, regardless of the fact that he was the one that kept insisting that they do so. He didn't like the trains, Aurora could just tell, regardless of what he said and he worried a lot about his cat Ralph, who had to stay with Freed while they were gone. He did not, however, worry about Raiden, the dog, but that was just because if the stupid mutt got lost, well, it would probably be for the best.

The maybe they could get another cat.

He was also frequently nervous about the hotel room situation. He thought Aurora was old enough to have her own room and, frequently, they let her have one (Mira would be over there constantly anyways, trying to talk with her and bond and bah; the woman was delusional if she thought that she and Aurora would become close than he and her were), but one night, the place they were going to be staying was all

booked up and they had to share.

Which wasn't that big of a deal. There were two beds. But still. Laxus just didn't want Aurora to, like, ever feel uncomfortable around him or anything of the like. Mira told him he was being stupid for even thinking that and short of him walking around in his underwear, the girl would be fine with him.

And she was, of course. Aurora actually seemed to like Laxus a lot. Not just in the conceited way that he assumed everyone loved him, but rather in the way that he could tell that she genuinely enjoyed when he was going over different kinds of magic with her or when they were sitting around the house, playing some more of those boardgames that Mira thought everyone just loved so much (they didn't).

Things weren't perfect, of course, not by any regard, but things were as close as they could possibly get to perfection. Honest, they just were. Aurora was rather reserved as a child, which gave Mirajane a chance impose her own will on the girl and Laxus could just go on about himself for hours and she'd only sit there and nod politely.

Not that they were the only ones reaping the benefits of the new relationship. Aurora got a lot out of the adoption as well. Not only in the jewels side of things either. Sure, she was well provided for and that was one of the best part about things, but at the same time, she also just enjoyed them in general. She loved her new pets, she loved going up with her adopted father to the guildhall, liked when she and Mirajane spent the day hanging around Magnolia, and she definitely enjoyed her new cousin, Lisanna's baby. She liked babysitting her and playing with her and she just felt so complete.

Honest, she just did.

Right up until it happened.

"You look cute in your father's coat," Mira giggled to Aurora that day as they walked around the town with some name that Aurora couldn't recall. It had been a rather dank, dismal day outside and they'd been dismayed to find out that there was an issue with the trains, leaving them stranded where they were for the time being. Laxus was the most frantic over it all, given that he'd wanted to get back to Magnolia and snag an S-Class job to head out on immediately, but it was looking like that wasn't in the cards.

Aurora only bowed her head a bit, continuing to follow the woman around aimlessly. Laxus had gone off on his own, annoyed with the whole situation and not wanting Aurora to see him so upset. Little things, as she was noticing, could really get under the man's skin. Before he left though, he grumbled something to her about how cold it was out and what was she doing without a coat? She was about to tell him that she honestly didn't feel as if she needed one when he just shrugged off his big fluffy one and stuck it on her.

Then he stomped off and Mirajane had giggled, because Laxus was just so silly when he was upset. And Aurora found that the coat, while warm, more than dwarfed her, but that was okay. She liked it.

"Mmmm," Mirajane was going on, as the two walked around the city together, each carrying their own suitcase and Mira Laxus' discarded one as well. "It is a bit windy though, I suppose. Not really cold though. You know Laxus though; he worries about everything." Then she grinned over at the girl. "He's planning on leaving for a job for a bit when we get home and I, of course, have to go back to work. Is there anything that you plan to do while we're both so busy?"

"I dunno," she whispered softly. "I haven't thought about it."

"Well, I'm glad for that," Mira giggled. "That means you were having tons of fun with us, huh? So much so you didn't think about the next week?" More giggles. If Laxus was brooding, Aurora found that Mirajane was completely bubbly. "I'm sure Master will have a few things for you to do when we get back into town."

The man frequently did. Master Makarov seemed very interested in keeping Aurora very busy. Or at least keeping her away from Laxus. It seemed like a pretty fun game to the old man, getting under his grandson's skin by keeping his new daughter busier with him. Aurora caught onto the slight rivalry between the two men quite early (they fought over who was the better mage, who Mirajane cared more about, who could eat more hotdogs, once, which was kinda odd, but silly all the same) and just put up with it. Makarov was very kind to her.

Plus he was always making her cookies. Laxus would grumble something under his breath whenever that happened, but Aurora just thought he was jealous that he didn't know how to make cookies.

"Or," Mirajane was going on as they continued to walk around, looking at all the different shops, "you could probably spend some time with Lisanna. She really does enjoy having you over, helping with the baby."

"That would be fun!" And Aurora perked up, just for a moment, grinning over at the woman. "I really like that. Except for when..."

"Bickslow's not nearly as unapproachable as he seems, you know," Mira told her with a soft smile. Even five months out, Aurora hadn't taken much to the man yet. "He's just a bit odd."

"I know." Bowing her head once more, Aurora mumbled about how he didn't bother her or something of the like. Mirajane just sighed though before changing the subject once more.

"Raider will be glad to see you, anyhow," Mirajane told her. "He really loves you, you know."

"He's really great," Aurora agreed. "I always wanted a dog."

"I love dogs," Mira gushed, as she had before many times. "Laxus though, now he- Oh. There he is. Laxus!"

He was coming their way already though, a cup holder housing what looked like smoothies in his hands. Apparently, he'd managed to calm down.

"Here," he grumbled, going to let Mirajane pick one of the cups before nodding at Aurora. "For while we wait."

Mirajane just giggled. "Thanks, dragon."

Grunt. Then, to Aurora, he said, "These stupid trains never run right when I need them. Literally ever. This is why I don't take trains. Why I--"

"Lexus, we are four days from Magnolia by foot," his wife said with a slight frown. "The trains will work when they work. I thought you went for a breather?"

"I went for smoothies." When Aurora took hers, Lexus only turned to make a face at Mirajane. "Obviously."

"Lexus--"

"I'm sorry," Aurora said suddenly, making them both glance at her. "I was the one that wanted to stay an extra day. I--"

Mira gave her a slight smile. "Aurora--"

"You're fine," Lexus told her simply, if not a tad dismissively. "It's these stupid train conductors though--"

"Oh, hush." Mirajane started walking again and, with a slight grunt, Lexus followed her. Quickly Aurora moved to do the same. "You're such a baby."

"I'm not a baby," he grumbled as she shoved his bag once more off on him. "I just wish that something went right for once."

"Because saying something like that isn't babyish?"

"No." Then, "And shut up, Mirajane. I just know that Ralph is probably worried."

"Oh, Lexus, honestly?"

"Yes, honestly. I told him that I'd be back and--"

"He's a cat!"

"So? I'm sure he has a basic concept of the passage of time. What? You think that only humans know that days pass? Elitist."

"How is that elitist? To know that animals aren't as intelligent as we are?"

"Ralph isn't just an animal, Mirajane. He-- Aurora."

They'd come to a more open area in the market then, with many people bustling around. Aurora had pulled Lexus to a stop though, quite suddenly, and it made the man frown back at her. Mirajane, taking notice of this, came to a stop as well.

"What's wrong?" She came closer to the girl. "Aurora? Did you need something or--"

But she wasn't looking at either of them. Just holding tightly to Laxus' arm while staring off, passed her two adopted parents.

"I..." She glanced, finally, at both of them before releasing Laxus' arm. "I have to go. I have to-"

"Go where? Aurora-"

"I-" she started, but that time, suddenly just stopped. She looked stricken too as she just dropped the cup in her hand, the smoothie splattering on Laxus' boots which, for the record, wasn't cool, but he didn't even notice it then. Only moved to lay a hand on her shoulder. When he did so, Aurora shrunk back a bit.

"What is it?" Mirajane's touch she didn't shy away from. "Aurora? Did you see something? Or-"

"Someone." Laxus, finally, turned to follow her eyesight to the best of his ability over to a little cafe patio where a number of people were seated. A young couple, arguing over something, as well as a man, by himself, hunched over a plate of food. His back was to them, but when he lifted his head, if only for a moment, to push some of his hair out of his eyes when it fell down, Aurora flinched, just a bit.

"What?" Mirajane was still lost. "What are you-"

"Who is he?" Laxus looked back then to Aurora, but she only shook her head and repeated her request.

"I want to go." And she sounded so pitiful too, like she was begging him. "Please, Laxus."

He only stared though, at her, gaze hard, and Mirajane finally moved to take the girl's arm.

"Come on, Aurora." She gently led her away. "Lax, take care of the luggage, okay? We'll be back."

He didn't want to let them go. At all. He wanted Aurora to tell him right then and there what some fifty year old man could have possibly done to her before he'd met her that could make her so fearful of him.

He had a few sickening ideas, but knew he'd have to hear them before he could just go over there and give the man what he deserved; to be fried on the spot.

Laxus also wanted to go over there anyways. Not to murder the man. Yet. Just to...to see. He wasn't sure. He'd figure it out when he got there.

But Mirajane had left him with all their bags and he couldn't just leave them. Or could he?

He'd made the decision to do just that when, upon turning around to head over there, he found that the man was just...gone. He spotted him, moments later, heading away from the cafe and wanted to run after him, but at the same time didn't want to get too separated from Mirajane and Aurora in the unfamiliar city; not at a time such as it

was.

So he waited, there, on that street corner. Growled to himself. Scared a few passersby. Got asked by the shop owner he was in front of to vacate. Then growled at that guy, about made the man piss himself, and then apologized and explained that he was just waiting for his wife and daughter and that, if he would kindly, just leave him the eff alone, it would be much obliged.

Mira and Aurora returned, however, before the shop owner inevitably got a constable or something to take care of him. Whatever. Who the fuck sells only hats anyways?

"The trains are working again," was all Mirajane told him when they arrived. She had an arm wrapped tightly around Aurora's shoulders though and the girl was holding the woman's smoothie, which had no doubt been given to her as some sort of a comfort (it was failing, more than likely), all the while giving him the look that he'd learn to realize meant they'd talk later.

But Laxus didn't want to talk later.

"Aurora," he asked as she tried hard not to make it obvious that she was nervously glancing around for the man. Laxus had never seen the teen cry before, not in the months that she'd been with them, and the sight of her red eyes and puffy eyelids put him on edge. "Tell me what-"

"We're getting on the train, Laxus." Mirajane left an arm around the girl, but did move to pick up her own bag from the ground. Then she nodded at the other two, hinting to her husband to gather them up. "Now."

And Aurora wouldn't catch his eye and they were already walking away and, hell, he was going to just have to follow and wait for that explanation, apparently.

He didn't get it until they were on a train some time later, headed back home. Aurora sat across from him, with Mirajane, and fell asleep against her shoulder rather quickly. Then it was just the two of them.

"What was all that about, Mira?" he finally asked when it was obvious that the thirteen year old was for sure asleep. "Huh?"

"Laxus, at home we can-"

"What," he repeated, voice low now for more than just keeping certain it didn't awaken Aurora, "was that about?"

For a moment, Mirajane glanced down at the teenager before out the window and then, finally, her husband. To him, she only said, "Aurora knew that man."

"Okay. And? What about it? Why-"

"He wasâ€¦| Laxus, I don't-"

"She's my daughter too."

That got her then as Mira finally whispered, "He's from Bosco. He's  
aâ€| Not a trader, but a..."

Lexus frowned. "What does this have to do with Aurora?"

"She says that when she was young...he bought her and her mother."

Stifling at that, the man attempted to use logic. "That can't be right. The orphanage didn't say anything about it. Shouldn't that be something they say?" He felt his body heat up then, though he didn't know if it was from anger or complete and utter lack of ability to do anything. "I mean-"

"It wasn't...sexual, Lexus," she added, though her face was heating up as well, just from having to specify that. "It was-"

"It doesn't fucking matter." And he was working hard not to get all riled up, but he was finding it hard. The man had been right there. Right fucking there. The man that had...thatâ€| "How could..."

"Calm down."

"You fucking calm down." Then he huffed. "How come you're just acting like this isn't news, Mira? Or-"

"Well," she said slowly, glancing down at Aurora who still seemed to be resting before back at the man before her. "I sort of already knew."

Lexus breath caught once more. "W-What?"

Mira held off on shrugging as not to disturb Aurora, but did look off. "We've shopped together, Lexus. I've seen herâ€| She has a burn on her side. Like...a branding. We'veâ€| She's told me about it before. And how she was rescued and-"

"Why," he growled, his gaze smoldering, "didn't you fucking tell me about-"

"This is why."

"He was right there, Mira!"

And he couldn't help it. That time he kinda exploded, attracting not only the attention of those around them, but also awakening Aurora, who sat bolt right up, as if startled.

"I..." Lexus got to his feet then. "I'll be back."

He lucked out and there was no one in the restroom when he got there. Taking his time in it, Lexus washed his face and stared into the stained mirror for some time before finally bring himself back down to a point where he could avoid going into a complete rage once more. Then, with a long breath, he headed right back out there to sit with them once more.

Aurora had his coat on still and, forcing a grin, Lexus only sat across from her before summoning his headphones.

"Here," he said gently before holding them out to her. "Aurora. I know how bored you must be."

"N-No," the brown haired teen protested softly, though she did accept them. "I'm fine. I justâ€¦ I'm sorry, Laxus, that I-"

"Hey." He lowered his head a bit, so that they could stare one another in the eyes. "What did I say? You don't have to be worry for anything, Aurora. Alright?"

When she nodded, he swallowed before looking off. He didn't know if she'd take it as a betrayal of trust or not, if he let on that Mirajane had keyed him in on what had gone on, so he didn't add anything about how if he ever saw that man again, or anyone she knew from Bosco, that there was a good chance he would murder them right then and there on the spot. Only glanced at his wife, who tried to smile, if only a bit, though it didn't come out quite right.

Their vacation was over. And on such a sour note.

It was late by the time that they got to Magnolia. Aurora slept most of the way, with Laxus headphones in, and Mirajane did as well for a bit. He couldn't drift off though and was on edge for the rest of the ride back. He could tell that Aurora wasn't comfortable either, as every time she woke up, she'd quickly glance around nervously before hunkering back down against the window, as if fearful of something. And Laxus wanted to let her know that she was okay, that he'd never let anything happen to her, never ever, but he wasn't sure how to put it all into words, so he remained silent.

Over time, he was certain, he'd show her that. It would just take a bit was all.

He had a lot of time though, in those hours, to contemplate what had happened.

And, of course, also what that man looked like. That image was burned into his mind. The long, dark hair. The tan skin. His build. His height. The slight gimp he had when he walked, as if some sort of lingering injury.

He could almost swear he had a scent associated with him, but he knew that wasn't true. He hadn't had a chance to do that.

But he would. Laxus would see that man again, he knew he would. He'd just better hope he'd found his way back to fucking Bosco before it happened.

It was dark when they arrived in Magnolia, and the town was mostly sleeping. Mira decided they'd pick the dog and cat up in the morning, as they all needed the night to decompress. And even though she'd slept the entire train ride, Aurora shrunk off to her bedroom almost immediately, closing the door softly behind.

"You coming to bed, dragon?" Mirajane asked after the two had shared a sandwich for a snack. "Or-"

"I wanna stay up." He looked up at her as the woman came to gently press a kiss to his head. "I...I can't sleep."

"Lax, it was a long time ago," the woman told him softly. "And it's new for us, but Aurora's dealt with this for years. And has gotten past it. She-"

"He was right there," was all he told her. "Right there, Mira. And I-"

"She's fine. And you're fine. And we're all fine. So just come to bed and-"

"I have to stay up." He was on the couch and she only went to get him a blanket and pillow. "In case she, like, needs me. And even if she doesn't. So she knows that she's okay. I'd stay up all night for her."

And he meant it.

Not that it helped any, about three hours later, as he was laying around on the couch in the darkened house, skimming through a book with a lamp on, when there was a sudden yell. A cry, really. One he'd never heard before.

Aurora.

He fell off the couch in his haste and tripped over his blanket. Mirajane was up before him and got to her first, even though she was in the bedroom, and he was realizing then that staying up on the couch just wasn't cutting.

"I'm fine," the teen was trying to tell Mirajane when he got to her bedroom, the woman moving to sit on the edge of the bed with her and cradle her head against her. "I just..."

"It's okay," Mira yawned a bit. "It just brought back a lotta memories, huh?"

Lexus felt awkward, standing there in the doorway, but was also slightly out of his element. In all that he'd dealt with since Aurora arrived (her apparent interest in boys, the fact that she wanted to spend way too much time with Pantherlily who, of course, ate up the attention, that embarrassing time he overheard she and Mirajane speaking about, er, feminine issues which he had kinda hoped to pretend she never had, etc), waking up from a nightmare never had been one. He'd thought that he'd have to, when they first took her home, as he'd feared the worst on the extremely damaged scale, but Aurora had seemed pretty acclimated right off the bat.

Until, apparently, her past was shoved in her face without warning.

"I don't," Aurora mumbled against Mirajane's chest as she rested her head there, "ever want to go back."

"You won't. I promise. You're okay. Not to...to him or to the orphanage or anywhere. Laxus and I want you here and you want to be here, so-"

"What if," she went on, "he found me? Or if he was looking for me? Or if-"

"Sweetie, it was just a coincidence. Not-"

"If he ever fucking showed his face around you again, I'd take care of it." There. Laxus found what he was good for.

"Laxus, go away." Except in Mirajane's eyes. "You're not help-"

He only came closer, stopping in front of Aurora to stare down at her. "He isn't going to come near you, Aurora. None of that shit that happened to you in Bosco can hurt you here. You're with us now. With me. You're my daughter. I'd never let anyone take you away. And if we ever see that man again-"

"Laxus, seriously, knock it-"

"Shut up, Mira." He didn't even glance at her. Aurora was staring up at him then and he didn't want to look away from her. "You're safe with us, Aurora. Alright? And you don't ever have to feel as if you're not."

She only sniffled and scooted away from Mirajane a bit. "I didn't mean to wake you up. I-"

"You're fine." Laxus turned then, just like that. Coughing into his hand, he cleared his throat before saying, "I'll go make some tea or somethin'."

Mirajane and Aurora stayed in her room for awhile, talking, but eventually they went out into the living room and sat on the couch, awaiting the tea.

Laxus was nervous once more, when he came bearing a cup for Aurora eventually as well as one for his wife. They were seated on the couch together and, slowly, he moved to sit on the other side of their daughter. Mirajane and her had gotten rather close rather quickly, leaving Mira to frequently hug and love on her, but Laxus mostly tried to show Aurora in other ways that he cared about her.

Like showing her magic. Or telling long-winded tales about his glory days.

At the moment, however, she seemed like she just needed a hug and, well, Laxus was never too good at those sorts of things, especially when what had someone so down was something that pissed him severely off as well, but he did gently pat her on the top of the head, trying his hardest to be at least somewhat comforting.

"I just wish that Raiden was here," Aurora mumbled to them at one point as Mirajane snuggled her on one side and Laxus flanked her watchfully on the other. "That's all."

"We'll get him back tomorrow," Mirajane yawned. "And I'm sure he'll be glad to be back in your bedroom too. I bet he can't sleep well without you either. He's been so much happier since you've been here. Mmmm. We've all been."

It was late though and, though Aurora was still rather tense, Laxus eventually got Mirajane to head off to bed.

"We're fine," he told her. "And you have work in the morning."

Aurora's just gonna stay up with me for a little while longer. Right, Rory?"

Her insistence of this fact was the only thing that got Mirajane to shrink off to the bedroom, though she made Aurora promise to come get her if she needed anything at all.

For a bit, when it was just the two of them, Laxus and Aurora only sat there, next to one another, as she shied away from him a bit. He knew that he was the adult in the situation, that he was the one that was going to have to start the conversation, but at the same time, he just didn't know what to say. At all.

Finally, something came tumbling out and, though it had little to do with the problem at hand, Laxus trudged on.

"You know," he told her softly as she just sat there, on the other side of the couch, a blanket over her shoulders. "When we were still just talking about...about adopting a kid and hadn't really put a lot of thought into it, we went through a whole thing, right? Trying to decide if we wanted a young kid, which I didn't because diapers are gross and children are gross too, for the most part, and then we had to decide if we wanted a son or a daughter and Mira didn't really care and I didn't really care, honestly, because it was more her thing than mine and then there was trying to figure out which room we'd give to you.

"And it's totally stupid now that I think about it, but I went through a whole decision process about it. Because this house is kinda Mirajane's and has been for years, but since I've moved in, I took the two extra bedrooms that Elfman and Lisanna used to use and turned them into my space. I had a weight room and a study. And I couldn't figure out which one to give up, you know? My study, which I go in to sit around and smoke my cigars in since Mira hates the smell of them, or my weight room, which I obviously use very much. I honestly debated this more with myself more than having a kid in general.

"Which is weird, right? And stupid. And dumb. But I finally decided to put my weight room stuff out in the garage, because I can use them out there, even if it is a bit cramped, and keep my study, because I can't just move that out to the garage, can I? And then, when all my stuff was out there, in the garage, I just knew it was right. It's probably for the better, actually. I can play my music as loud as I want out there when I'm working out and my motorcycle's out there, so I can work on it too, when I get bored of working out. More space too. It just, you know, made so much sense.

"Which I guess, Aurora, is what I'm trying and failing to tell you. That once I did it, once I made the choice to just shove all my weight stuff out there, it made sense. Just like when you were here, with us, it just made sense to you, huh? And I don't even think about it anymore, you know? What it was like when your room was my weight room. I like it better, actually. So why even think about how it was before?"

He thought he'd done good too, until it suddenly hit him that what he'd said was rather dismissive of the fact that she's clearly suffered a major trauma as a...slave or whatever she was to that man and that he kinda just wrote it off like a childish little fear and

shit; he wasn't as great at being a father as he always tried to pretend.

"I didn't mean," he started, but only coughed. "Uh...Auroraâ€¦ I justâ€¦ I don't know what it was like for you toâ€¦ And you don't have to tell me about it! I don't..."

She was just sitting there too, staring at him, and he felt really...awkward. And stupid. And lame.

Had he brought that up before? Because Aurora was constantly making him feel lame. Not with anything she did, just in general.

Having a thirteen year old daughter though forced you to be old, he figured.

Lexus took in a deep breath then before looking up at the ceiling. Then, slowly, he looked over to Aurora and said simply, "I know it hasn't been that long and you haven't gotten to know us completely yet, that it'll take time, but that guyâ€¦ I know seeing him was jarring, or whatever, but all you had to do was tell me, Aurora. And I would have-"

"What if he was looking for me?" she asked as Lexus only stared. "Or saw me and now he's going to-"

"Aurora, you'd been with that orphanage for years, hadn't you?" Lexus knew, of course, that she was just being irrational in her fear of such a thing, as the meeting was pure chance, but at the same time knew he couldn't just ignore her concerns. She needed him to talk her through things, clearly, and he could do that.

Hopefully.

"Well, yes," the teenager admitted, sniffing just a bit. "I guess so."

"Then he's probably not-"

"But he said..." More sniffles. Then nothing. Lexus slowly moved closer to her.

"I'm not gonna make you ever tell me something you don't wanna," the man whispered as he gently wrapped an arm around her shoulders. It was the most touching the two had ever done and, at first, Aurora was stiff. Then, slowly, she leaned against him. "Shit happens. A lotta bad shit. I didn't know, you know, that you were from Bosco. I guess I just assumed that what they told us about you was true. That they found you after your mother died in-"

"They did," she mumbled as she stared down at their laps. "But that was after we were saved from Bosco. When we got to Fiore, we didn't have anywhere to go and we lived on the streets for awhile, but my mother was sick. And when she died...there was a church that took me in and then I went through a few different orphanages before I ended up at the one you adopted me from. But...I remember Bosco. I was young, but Iâ€¦ And I would never forget what he looks like. That was him. Mirajane told me that maybe I was wrong and was just-"

"I believe you." Lexus nodded a bit. "The way you reacted... I

believe you. And I'm sure Mirajane does too. She's just trying to help you forget about it, I'm sure. That's what Strausses do; they forget. Put on a happy face and forget all the bad shit that's happened to them. It's kinda their thing." He grinned then, for the first time in a bit, before saying, "But you're not a Strauss. You're a Dreyar now. And that means you deal with your shit head on. You might bury it a bit, but you never forget it. And you never forgive. And one day, I'll make it right. If that dick's living in Fiore now, then I'll run into him again. And I'll fucking take care of everything, Aurora. I promise."

"You can't." And she sounded serious then as she sat up tall and looked up at him. "It's not wrong in Bosco, toâ€¦ But for you to hurt him here, it is. And then you might get in trouble and then-"

"I don't get in trouble. I'm Laxus Dreyar. I-"

"I don't want you to ever have to go away." She sounded like such a kid when she said that that Laxus had to remember that, though he was quite independent at her age, thirteen, really, was still just a kid. She wasn't like he'd been, defiant and resilient, or like Mirajane had been, repressive and destructive. She was Aurora. And Aurora needed parents. Ones who didn't haul off and do stupid things. "Especially not over something that I...that..."

"You," he told her simply, arm still wrapped around her shoulders, "didn't do anything. At all. If you don't want me to track this guy down though-"

"Were you planning to?"

Oh, hell yes. That very night, if he didn't feel the need to stay with her and make sure she was alright.

"Doesn't matter." Laxus pulled her closer to him instinctively. "And, Rory, for the record, I really don't think he's looking for you. Alright? So don't get all upset about that. It was just coincidental. That's all. I know you're scared, and I know why you're scared, but really, don't worry about it. Even if he was, you're my daughter now. And I'm not letting anyone take you. Never."

It took a bit, but eventually he got Aurora to head off back to bed. He left her door open, however, as he left, before heading off to bed himself. Mirajane was going to be getting up in an hour, so he was extremely careful about not waking her as he climbed into bed. Then he just laid there for a bit, shockingly not thinking much of the day, but rather of the fact that he'd been very pumped about getting back to Ralph and, well, that would have to be put on hold until the next day at least.

Sigh. If those damn trains had been working, then Aurora would have had to see that guy, and then she wouldn't have had to deal with all of those issues and damn, Laxus hated trains.

For numerous reasons, of course, but now that was a big one as well.

"Mmmm," Mira yawned at some point, shifting closer to him so that she could nuzzle against his side. "Did Aurora go to bed?"

"Yeah." He shut his eyes. "Go back to sleep. I didn't wanna wake you. I just--"

"Are you gonna leave, dragon? On your...job?"

He knew what she was asking. Implying. But he only let out a slow breath.

"Aurora doesn't want me to go. Toâ€¦ She'd rather have me here." Then he shrugged a bit. "And I don't think that it was any more than an accident that we stumbled upon that asshole. I could spend the next week tracking him down and extracting revenge or I could just focus on what's more important."

"And that is?"

"Making sure that Aurora's okay." He shrugged a bit. "She's notâ€¦ She's different than I was, you know, when I was her age. She went through shit that I didn't have to. So it's going to be different, helping her get passed it. And I want to do that. Or learn to do it." Then he swallowed. "I am gonna learn to. She's the most important thing in our lives now."

Mirajane let that sink in for a moment before gently humming and adding, "Ralph had to be dethroned eventually, I suppose."

"You act like I'm, like, in love with the cat or something. I could take or leave him."

"Sure."

"I mean, yeah, fine, I'd rather take him," Laxus went on, wiggling his toes, "but I could definitely take or leave him."

"I know."

"He's, just, like the best cat ever. But that's not saying much because cats aren't cool or anything and I don't care much about them, so it's whatever, really."

"I keep agreeing, but you keep trying to convince me."

"We aren't even that close. And he's your cat, really, so why are we even talking about this? I mean, really? Kinda silly, don't you think, demon?"

"I think that's an odd thing to say when, before, you sure were trying to convince me that he knew what day it was--"

"I was being playful. For Aurora's sake. Sue me."

She just cuddled closer to him before whispering, "I think she'll be okay. It just shocked her system a bit. And if she wants, I'll ask Lisanna to cover for me tomorrow and we can--"

"I'll hold off on my S-Class job for a bit." He let out a slow breath. "I'm getting pretty old anyways. Need to recover from my vacation before I head out on work."

"Is that what you'll tell her?"

Nodding, he said, "If that's what she needs to hear, sure."

"Did you guys talk? Tonight?"

"A little bit."

"That's good." She gently tapped his chest then, right over his guild marking. "She sure likes you a whole bunch, dragon."

"She trusts you a whole bunch more though." He tried hard not to sound disappointed in that, as he should have been (they were both women, after all; it would be weird if he truly connected more with the thirteen year old girl than she did). "Demon."

"That might be true," she agreed. "But she loves Raiden more than all of us."

Lexus only grunted. "Damn mutt. The only good thing about him is her."

"Which is saying something, considering we had him for an entire year before as well as the fact that, who was it that went out and got him? Oh, right; you."

"I bought him \_for\_ you," he pointed out. "And you know it. Dogs are so...stupid."

"Oh, because Ralph is so smart."

"Not that I care," the slayer complained, peeking an eye open just to stare down at her, "but yeah, he is. So there."

The day didn't call for giggles, so it got none out of the woman, but she did press a kiss to his side and he grinned despite himself before finally letting out a long breath.

"Goodnight, demon."

Nuzzling into him one last time (and very aware that she officially had twenty-eight minutes before her alarm clock went off), Mira whispered back, "Night, dragon."

The next morning, Lexus awoke to Mirajane being gone and a knocking at the front door. It was, of course, Freed coming to return Ralph.

"He was rather distraught," the letter mage said as he dropped the orange kitten into the man's waiting arms. Then Ralph scratch him and Lexus tossed him to the ground to go be a bad cat wherever the hell he wanted to be. Stupid animal. "He moaned at the front door constantly. I do not think he is becoming accustomed to you all leaving for such long periods of--"

"Can you do something for me?" Lexus was just standing there, in some sleeping pants (he used to sleep in boxers, but with Aurora in the house, he felt that pants were a skosh more appropriate), but didn't usher the man into the house.

"Of course, Lexus. I--"

"Can you go pick up the stupid mutt from Gramps' place?" the slayer asked. "I want 'im to be here for Aurora when she wakes up."

"Of course, Laxus. But why-"

"I'mma stay here, yeah? Make her some breakfast."

He was getting better at pancakes. Sorta. Aurora ate them, anyways, with minimal complaints.

"I could stay," Freed offered. "And cook. And you could-"

"I need to do it," Laxus told him simply. "So-"

"Did something happen?" Freed sounded concerned. "On the trip? Or-"

"No," Laxus swallowed. "I just...I'm feelin' fatherly, yeah? So go get her the dog and I'll be here, makin' breakfast. Hurry; we plan this right, the two might even line up."

They didn't. Laxus burned numerous pancakes. The smoke detector even went off at one point, dragging Aurora out of bed, but it was okay, she said, when it was decided they'd just go out for breakfast.

She was in the shower though, getting ready, when Freed showed up with the very excited Raiden. And boy, both of them sure were happy to see one another. Ralph tackled Aurora actually, when she came out of the bathroom (he'd been sitting patiently outside the door, awaiting such a thing), but that was okay, because she very much so enjoyed it all the way.

"If you're going to stick around for awhile, Laxus, instead of going on a job," Aurora said over some cups of coffee (his daughter was very mature for her age; regardless of the fact he tried to constantly avoid this realization and force her into orange juice) and donuts, "do you think that maybe nowâ€|we can try learning magic?"

Laxus had to swallow before speaking, doing so quickly. Then he got out, "Of course. I-"

"I mean, I know we talked about it before, but I think that I finally know what I wanna learn." She seemed unsure, regardless of her words though, but still was able to meet his eyes for once. "And if you still will then I-"

"I've been waiting since we first talked about it for you to say that," he admitted, if not a bit uncharacteristically. Realizing this, he cleared his throat before reaching for his coffee that sat at the table between them. They'd taken the donuts back home with them, so Ralph was underfoot, awaiting Aurora to not so sneakily pass him a donut hole. "I was, uh, you know...worried that you'd been wanting Gajeel or Pantherlily or somethin' to help you out with-"

"Of course not." Aurora seemed shocked by that statement. "I want you to. Laxus."

Coughing, Laxus looked off then, fighting against his grin heavily. "Yeah, well, I got a busy schedule, as you know, but I'll figure somethin' out. Then, soon enough, you'll be up at the hall with me everyday."

Aurora hadn't said anything about spending all day, every day as a mage with her father, but didn't feel the need to correct him on that.

Not yet anyways.

"Yeah," Aurora grinned right back at him, less abashedly. "I've thought a lot about it all."

"Oh?" Laxus leaned forwards, just a bit. "Tell me about what interests you most then."

"Well...it's really weird and I don't really know if you can help me much, and I really don't know what to call it or if it can even really-"

"Rory." Laxus finally allowed himself a true grin, lowering his head just a bit so that he could stare at her full on. "Magic's all about creation. And if you can think it, you can create it, right? So don't worry about it. You're gonna be learning from me forever, aren't you? So we'll have forever to figure this out, won't we?"

Aurora could only nod her head then before whispering, "Yeah. I guess we can."

\* \* \*

><p><strong>Building up Aurora's character has been interesting. I haven't really given Mirajane and Laxus a kid with much depth other than Orion, which hinges on the fact that none of their other kids I've given them have really gotten old enough to be more than just bases for their future selves. Nathan's getting to that point and all of the Remember Me children are about there, but Orion's still, in my mind, the one with multiple layers. And now Aurora can be added to the club as well, if not a bit deeper, considering. <strong>

\*\*It's kind of nice though, having a story again that isn't completely centered in on Mirajane and Laxus' romantic life. It's taken more than a backseat in this series so far and probably will continue to, when I finally get around to being able to do a full story on this whole thing. Which is coming, by the way. Accidents and Incidents is nearly to its end and Closure's getting there as well and, when they're finally both over, I'll finally be able to start that Parenthood story I've been laying all the ground work for and give Marriage Material's Laxus and Mirajane their own full story.  
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\*\*Closure up next and I haven't started on it yet, but considering it's a Laxus chapter, it should only take a few days (if that) to get out. I've also been working on a Lisanna centric one-shot I want to finally knock out, but we'll see. \*\*

End  
file.